

SPECIFICATIONA COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM FOR PROVIDING INFORMATIONUSING SUBSCRIBER LINESTECHNICAL FIELD

5 This invention relates to a communications technique suitable for providing information relevant to a community or a local society.

BACKGROUND ART

10 A variety of servers are connected with wide area networks and local area networks to compose the Internet. Nodes on the Internet are uniquely assigned with IP addresses, and worldwide communications among nodes can be performed by specifying corresponding IP addresses. For instance, people access a WWW server storing a target HTML document to browse
15 the document.

20 By the way, a user would rather not want to collect information all over the world in many cases but information relevant to the community. For instance, a user wants to get information as to services provided by the local government, local shops, local volunteer activities, etc. Moreover, a user often wants to do opinion exchange and enjoy bulletin board services within the local area.

25 For those purposes, a user of the Internet finds out an appropriate server by means of one or more retrieval services provided through the Internet, and brows contents on the server. Moreover, if it is necessary, the user registers the server in the user's book mark, etc. However, the retrieval

services and the book mark registration only provide a possible access route to information as to the community. The user still sees a vast uncultivated field of the Internet connected with nodes spread in the world. A bird's-eye view of information relevant to the community could not be provided.

The present invention accordingly aims at providing a communications technique suitable for providing information relevant to a community.

DISCLOSURE OF THE INVENTION

According to the present invention, in order to attain the above mentioned object, a communications system comprising: branching means connected with a communications line; switching system means connected with one terminal of the branching means; and, information providing server, provided as associated with the switching system means, and connected with another terminal of the branching means, for providing a subscriber device with service in response to a request through the communications line.

The above mentioned communications line can be a subscriber line connected with a subscriber device or a relay line connecting a switching station with a higher order switching station. The communication line can be cable or wireless.

In this configuration, the branching means enables not only a conventional telephone call but also access to a server. The access to the server is basically limited to the territory of the corresponding switching station, because the access is performed through the branch point in front of the subscriber

24. Moreover, a switch 15 and an LAN 16 can be installed in the relay switching station 23 as shown with broken lines.

FIG.2 illustrates the configuration of the switch 15, and in this figure, the switch 15 has a switch function unit 15a and a control unit 15b. In this embodiment, for conventional communications (a telephone call) using switched connection over the switching system 14, a conventional subscriber number is dialed as it is. On the other hand, a service identification number, for instance, "0AB0" (A and B are for instance "5") is dialed, when accessing a resource over the LAN 16. The control unit 15b of the switch 15 detects the service identification number, and then switches the switch function unit 15a from the switching system 14 to the LAN 16. The switch can be returned to the original state by a possible method. One method is to dial another service identification number "0ab0" (a, b are for example "3").

Between the switch 15 and the LAN 16, an access server or another like device, not shown, is placed for interface between signals on the subscriber line 12 and on the LAN 16.

Moreover, the control unit 15b performs certain processing when the communications terminal 11 receives a call-out signal. For instance, upon receipt of a call-out signal, the switch function unit 15a is connected with the switching system 14 side for conventional communications (a telephone call). Alternatively, an HTML document indicating of receipt of the call-out signal (the telephone number, etc. of the calling party) is sent to the communications terminal 11, and then the user can control the switch. The data of received calls can be recorded with a recording function, and

a server such as the POP server 19 can be used for confirmation or replay of the recorded calls.

In this embodiment, a destination number is dialed in a conventional way for conventional communications. On the other hand, "0AB0" is dialed to participate communications over the LAN16, when accessing a resource on the LAN 16 for example a web page of the WWW server 17. Then, a transfer request is sent to the WWW server 17 using a convention procedure (CSMA/CD), and the communication terminal receives the requested HTML document and associated files.

As such, a resource on the LAN 16 can be accessed by for example a personal computer, and for example a web page is browsed. The resources on the LAN 16 can be controlled or administrated within the LAN, and therefore be regulated suitable for the concerned community. The system provides one of the best means to publicize, for instance, details of services provided by the local government, information as to the local schools, details of public facilities, etc. Moreover, it provides local commercial entities with one of the best advertisement method. Moreover, it is suitable also for purchase orders. For that purpose, data can be accepted by using CGI (Common Gateway Interface), etc. at the WWW server 17. Moreover, mails among local users can be exchanged.

When the territory of the switching station 13 is smaller than the range in which common information is to be shared (for example an administrative unit), a plurality of switching stations 13 belonging to the range can share at least a portion of the information and store the same copies respectively. Oppositely, when the territory of the switching station 13 is

bigger than the range in which common information is to be shared, the information can be divided into sub-sets to be provided (for corresponding smaller areas). Moreover, the switching station 13 can have a plurality of LAN 16 (with servers). The communications terminal 11 can be connected with a required LAN using a corresponding additional service identification number assigned for the corresponding area. For instance, a LAN 16 can be provided for each district section within Tokyo, such as, Chiyoda-ku, Chuo-ku. Moreover, two or more hosts can be installed in a single LAN 16 and a set of servers can be assigned to each small area. For instance, a WWW server 17 and an SMTP server 18 and a POP server 19 are provided for each small area. In this case, a user can get information relevant to the corresponding community by specifying the hostname.

While, in this embodiment, the LAN 16 is provided to enable access to a variety of servers such as the WWW server 17, the terminal can be connected with the server 17, etc. directly through the switch 15.

Moreover, it is possible to access a resource on the Internet 21 through the proxy server 20.

Moreover, a frequency division technique can be used for separation between conventional communications and other communications related to resources on the LAN 16. In that implementation, a splitter can be used in place of the switch 15. For instance, it is possible to do communications related to the LAN using a digital subscriber line method (ADSL, etc.).

Moreover, in a non-activated state, the communications terminal 11 is switched to the LAN 16, and upon receipt of a

control signal of call-out, the switch function unit 15a is controlled to switch to the switching system 14. Because the access to the LAN 16 does not apply the load to the switching system 15, the service cost of such an implementation is
5 considered as inexpensive.

FIG.3 illustrates the second embodiment of the present invention. In this embodiment, the invention is applied to a radio communications system. While a mobile communications system is exemplified here, one or more mobile stations can
10 be replaced by fixed radio communications devices. In FIG.3, the corresponding parts to those in FIG.1 are indicated with the corresponding referential symbols.

In FIG.3, a mobile station 31 and a base station 32 are connected through a wireless channel. The base station 32 is
15 connected with a switching station (mobile switching station) 13.

Also according to this embodiment, the resources on the LAN 16 can be accessed by dialing the predetermined service identification number. Remarkably, it is predicted that each
20 resource on the LAN 16, which is accessed by the mobile station 31 such as a mobile personal computer, or a personal digital assist, stores the information relevant to the area where the mobile station 31 stays, because the LAN 16 is provided for the switching station 13 covering the area. Therefore, the
25 system is suitable for providing people on travel or transit with the information relevant to the local area, for instance, traffic information, weather information, shopping information.

As described above, according to the embodiments of the

present invention, it is possible to access to an information providing LAN directly through a cable or wireless subscriber line, and obtain information relevant to a community. In this configuration, information services can be provided with more
5 inexpensive cost, because what is mainly used is only subscriber lines. Moreover, it is possible to connect also with the Internet, and an appropriate charge can be added in this case.

Subscriber lines can be conventional telephone lines or
10 ISDN lines.

Moreover, the LAN 16 can have an access server for accepting access by an external communications device through a telephone line, mobile communications line, or a dedicated line. Thus, the servers 17 to 19 can be accessed out of the territory of the subscriber switching station 13. In this case, the servers 17 to 20 on the LAN 16 can be maintained from the outside of the territory of the subscriber switching station 13. The access server makes it possible for a subscriber device, which is connected with the subscriber switching system 14 not
20 through the switch 15 but directly, to make an access to the LAN 16. Please note that such a subscriber device can not access the LAN 16 without the access server even if it is placed in the territory of the subscriber switching station.

INDUSTRIAL APPLICABILITY OF THE INVENTION

25 As described above, according to the present invention, one or more servers are provided as associated with a switching station, so as to provide mainly information relevant to a community.